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XIX.—THE WAGER IN *CYMBELINE*.

"Why," said Ia Beale Isoud, . . . "ye may not be called a good knight, but if ye make a quarrel for a lady."

Morte Darthur, x, lvi.

It has long been the fashion, when *Cymbeline* has been under discussion, to cite Dr. Johnson's famous criticism, and indeed one feels a whimsical joy in setting down so delightful a bit of square-toed dogmatism. "This play has many just sentiments, some natural dialogues, and some pleasing scenes, but they are obtained at the expense of much incongruity. To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation." The really significant thing, however, which makes this opinion worth repeating, is that so many of the best modern critics have expressed substantial agreement with it. Sir Walter Raleigh thinks that "Johnson speaks truly and moder-

ately,"¹ and Dr. H. H. Furness said, "Ay, Dr. Johnson was right in his estimate of this play of *Cymbeline*,—the sweetest, tenderest, profoundest of almost all the immortal galaxy."² Most writers, while not agreeing directly with Johnson, have taken a half-puzzled, half-apologetic attitude; they have obviously felt what Dr. Furness calls "deterioration" here, after the splendid achievement of the great tragedies and the Roman plays.

The purpose of the present paper is not to attempt a wholesale refutation of Johnson's charges, nor a defence of *Cymbeline* as a flawless work of art. This would require a degree of courage quite beyond the possession of the writer. There is too much truth and sense in Johnson's strictures to allow of their easy refutation. But it may very well be asked whether certain elements in the play which have been censured as blemishes are really such, after all; whether the critics from Johnson down, have not partly misunderstood Shakspeare's intentions. This is not a new subject of discussion; the play has never lacked defenders.³ One problem, however, and a very important one for the piece as a whole, still awaits solution. There has never been, so far as my knowledge extends, a really adequate analysis of the chief episode of the main plot, the wager between Posthumus Leonatus and Iachimo as to the chastity of Imogen, nor a wholly satisfactory treatment of the character and motives of Posthumus himself.

¹ *Shakespeare* (English Men of Letters Series) London, 1907, p. 142.

² *Variorum Cymbeline*, Phila., 1913, p. v.

³ The latest of these, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, in his unconventional study, *Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship* (N. Y., 1917) takes direct issue with Johnson, finding the play a masterpiece of craftsmanship, expressed in dramatically appropriate language. With much that he says I cannot agree.

Perhaps the severest of all the criticisms of the play have been directed at Posthumus, particularly for his acceptance of the wager, his belief in the guilt of Imogen, and his attempt upon her life. "Why," asks Sir Walter Raleigh, "did [Shakespeare] create so exquisite a being as Imogen for the jealous and paltry Posthumus?"⁴ "Especially repulsive to us," remarks Professor Brander Matthews,⁵ "is the main theme of the story, the monstrous wager which the husband makes with a casual stranger about his wife's chastity . . . its abhorrent grossness is inconceivable under the circumstances in which Shakspeare presents it." Dr. MacCracken finds that "Posthumus, Imogen's husband, appears weak and impulsive, foolish in making his wife's constancy a matter for wagers, and absurdly quick to believe the worst of her."⁶ Critics who look upon Shakspeare's plays as storehouses of moral teaching are naturally severe on Posthumus; Professor R. G. Moulton may speak for these. "The wrong of Posthumus is the commonest of moral perversions, the false sense of honor that dares not refuse a challenge, whatever the moral cost implied in its acceptance. It is the perversion which is the product of social narrowness and artificiality; the duellist dreads the sentiment immediately surrounding him in the coterie that has dubbed itself 'men of honor,' and forgets the great world with its balanced judgments and eternal principles of right."⁷

On the other hand, Posthumus has had his defenders. It is amusing to find that Gervinus praises him for just the quality in which Moulton finds him lacking. "In this moral anger [during the wager-scene] Posthumus is

⁴ *Loc. cit.*, p. 140.

⁵ *Shakspeare as a Playwright*, N. Y., 1913, p. 335.

⁶ *Introduction to Shakespeare*, N. Y., 1910, p. 200.

⁷ *The Moral System of Shakespeare*, N. Y. 1903, p. 79.

no less the same rare being as in the rest of his conduct. His irritation on such noble grounds shows his previous calmness and discretion for the first time in its right light, and this his ever-tested moderation reminds us to consider again and again the reason which drives him exceptionally to exasperation in a transaction so indelicate.”⁸ Similarly, Hudson finds in Posthumus a noble rage. “Womanhood is to him [Posthumus] a sacred thing: the whole course of his life has been such as to inspire him with the most chivalrous delicacy towards the sex: for his mother’s sake and his own, but, above all, for Imogen’s, the blood stirs within him, to hear woman made the theme of profane and scurrilous talk: the stale slander of libertine tongues his noble sensitiveness instinctively re-sents as the worst possible affront to himself.”⁹

It would be possible to extend such illustrative quotations almost indefinitely, but the foregoing must suffice to show, in a general way, what the detractors and defenders of Posthumus think of him. I venture to think that neither party is wholly right, and that the true solution must come through methods somewhat different from theirs. The first thing which strikes one in reading comments on the play is the forgetfulness of critics that due allowance must be made for the social conventions of Shak-

⁸ *Shakespeare Commentaries*, translated by F. E. Bunnett, N. Y., 1875, p. 667. According to the view of Gervinus, Cymbeline “treats uniformly throughout two opposite ideas or moral qualities, namely, truth in word and deed (fidelity), and untruth and faithlessness, falseness in deed or perfidy, falseness in word or slander” (p. 671). The story of Little Red Riding Hood treats uniformly throughout two opposing ideas or moral qualities also, trusting innocence and scheming villany, but nobody has ever supposed that a desire to contrast these moral concepts as such had anything to do with the evolution of the story.

⁹ H. N. Hudson, *Shakespeare, his life, art, and characters*. Boston, 1882, vol. II, p. 443.

spere's day, and of the earlier times when the wager-story was taking shape. This is not always true, of course,—for example, the statement by Professor Brander Matthews just quoted is particularly concerned with the effect of the archaic wager-theme upon us nowadays, in contradistinction to people of earlier times. But the historical point of view is too often forgotten; Posthumus and Imogen and Iachimo are too often treated as if they were persons of the nineteenth century, and their acts interpreted like those of characters in a modern realistic novel, instead of a tale the outlines and spirit of which had been determined by centuries of literary and social tradition. So able a writer as Professor Schelling can say,¹⁰ “Of what conceivable importance . . . is it that the story of *Cymbeline* may be found in Holinshed and Boccaccio? Wholly negligible seem these little pickings of small scholarship in view of the simple, wholesome, dominating influence of that exquisite picture of truest and sweetest womanhood, Imogen.” With this position I would take issue squarely,—all the more so since it seems to me particularly necessary in the case of *Cymbeline* to see what the sources are like, in order to judge Shakspeare's work intelligently. With some plays it may be possible to neglect literary antecedents, but not with this one.

The aim of the present paper, then, is to examine the main plot of *Cymbeline* in the light of Elizabethan social conventions and literary traditions. Some of the versions of the very old and widespread story which furnished the basis of this plot must be examined, but only for the purpose of illuminating Shakspeare's work, not for the sake of collecting and classifying variants of the wager-story. The

¹⁰ *Elizabethan Drama, 1558-1642*, Boston and New York, 1908, vol. I, p. 301.

main questions which we shall have to ask are: What was the meaning of the story as Shakspeare found it? How did he alter it, and what new elements did he give to it? How would the Elizabethans have understood it, as they saw it on the stage? In particular, what would they have thought of Posthumus Leonatus? Through such an analysis as this we shall, I hope, reach sound results, some of them of considerable importance. Chief of these is the substantial vindication of Posthumus, not, indeed, as a man without faults, but as blameless and even praiseworthy in accepting the wager, and, in the later part of the play, one to be judged as, like Othello, "perplex'd in the extreme" under great misfortune, and acting in accord with the ethics of his day and the conventions of romantic drama. Hardly less interesting will be the question why Posthumus has generally failed to arouse sympathy, and been regarded as weak and even vicious,—the answer to which can hardly be summed up in a single phrase.

The very real problem involved in analyzing the character of Posthumus is one which every thoughtful student of the play must have encountered. The writer has been obliged to make shift to explain it as best he could to university classes during the past fifteen years, and he has felt very keenly the inadequacy of existing interpretations. There is no need to urge the importance of a matter so vital to the play as a whole. But there is another reason which gives it a special demand upon our attention: there are strong indications that Shakspeare's chief interest was centred on the Posthumus-Imogen plot. Many of the inconsequences of the sub-plots seems due to another hand. Dr. Furness stated his convictions: "Regarded broadly, I believe that the Imogen love story and all that immediately touched it interested Shakespeare deeply; the Cymbeline portion was turned over to the assistant, who at

times grew vainglorious and inserted here and there, even on the ground sacred to Imogen, lines and sentiments that shine by their dulness.”¹¹ Such conclusions are, of course, insusceptible of proof. But we may feel confident that the earlier scenes of the main plot interested Shakspeare deeply. Upon them he lavished some of the most brilliant writing in the play. A correct understanding of them is of importance not only for *Cymbeline* as a whole, but for his general method in dramatic romance.

Readers who are repelled by “sources and analogues” may omit the following section, if they choose. But some knowledge of these as a whole is desirable, if only to show how widespread and how plastic was Shakespeare’s theme. A study of the wager-plot as a piece of story-telling would be full of picturesque contrasts,—it has exercised its charm for centuries upon gentle and simple, the profane and the pious, upon ballad-singers, moralists, poets, dramatists, and novelists.

I

The exact source or sources used for the Imogen-Posthumus-Iachimo plot will probably never be known. This plot is of course quite independent of the pseudo-historical setting in early Britain which Shakspeare derived from Holinshed. The closest analogue,—a very close one in many respects—is the ninth *novella* of the second day in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. There seems little doubt that this, or some version of it, is to be regarded as the main source. The resemblances between it and Shakspeare’s own work are striking.¹² He drew directly or indirectly

¹¹ *Loc. cit.*, p. vii.

¹² As has often been pointed out, the frightful punishment which Autolycus predicts for the Clown in the *Winter’s Tale* (Act. iv, Scene iv, ll. 812 ff.) seems to have been borrowed from the torture of Ambrogiuolo in this *novella*, though Boccaccio did not invent it.

upon the *Decameron* for other plays, and there is every reason to suppose that he must have been acquainted with so well-known a book. On the other hand, there are great divergences. How far these are due to the dramatist himself, it is difficult to say. Boccaccio's tales had of course been retold many times in different tongues, including English, with no great fidelity to the original, and Shakspeare may have worked from one of these altered versions.¹³ Furthermore, he may have known the wager-story quite independently of Boccaccio. It had attained a wide circulation in Western Europe before Boccaccio's time, and versions quite different from his were popular in the sixteenth century. Attempts to define Shakspeare's exact dependence on his models are, then, extremely hazardous, particularly since account must be taken of versions no longer extant. But the matter need not be unduly complicated; we ought to get rid of one "source" which encumbers "introductions" to *Cymbeline*,—the book of tales called *Westward for Smelts*. Shakspeare's supposed indebtedness to this appears, if the expression may be pardoned, particularly fishy.¹⁴ After all, we ought to credit

¹³ This has long been realized. Malone quoted the significant words in the 1620 English translation of the *Decameron* (see his ed. of 1793): "I know, most worthy lord, (says the printer in his Epistle Dedicatory,) that many of them [the novels of Boccace] have long since been published before, as stolen from the original author, and yet not beautified with his sweet style and elocution of phrase, neither savouring of his singular morall applications."

¹⁴ *Westward for Smelts, or the Water-man's fare of mad merry Western wenches, whose tongues, albeit like Bell-clappers they neuer leaue ringing, yet their tales are sweet, and will much content you.*

Written by Kinde Kit of Kingstone, London, 1620. Ed. J. O. Halliwell, London, Percy Society, 1848, vol. 22. The tale told by the Fishwife of Stand on the Green is the one presenting resemblances to *Cymbeline*. *Westward for Smelts* was entered in the Stationers's Register in Jan., 1619 (1620), and published in 1620.

him with a certain amount of inventiveness. He did not have to get all his incidents from books.

For purposes of convenience, we shall take Boccaccio's *novella*, as the closest extant analogue, for a point of

The only evidence of an earlier edition is a statement by Steevens: "It was published in a quarto pamphlet 1603. This is the only copy of it which I have hitherto seen. There is a late entry of it in the books of the Stationers' Company, Jan. 1619, where it is said to have been written by Kitt of Kingston." (quoted from the ed. of 1778) Malone (*ibid*) subjoins to Steevens's statement: "The only part of the fable, however, which can be pronounced with certainty to be drawn from thence, is, Imogen's wandering about after Pisanio has left her in the forest; her being almost famished; and being taken, at a subsequent period, into the service of the Roman General as a page." Collier (*Shakespeare's Library*, London, n. d., vol. II, p. xv), referring to Malone's remarks in Boswell's *Shakespeare*, observes that no copy of the date 1603 exists, "and the entry in the Stationers' Register seems to establish that it was a new publication. . . . we feel confident that there was no earlier impression [than that of 1620], and that Malone had been misinformed when he spoke of the existence of a copy dated 1603." Halliwell, (*Remarks of M. Karl Simrock on the Plots of Shakespeare's Plays*, Shakespeare Society, London, 1850, p. 64) says: "I am inclined to believe Steevens's assertion, because he refers to the entry in the Stationers' Register as containing information not found in the edition he used." But Steevens does not say that the edition of 1603 did not refer to Kind Kit as the author. The name looks like a pseudonym, and perhaps Steevens thought the evidence of the *Register* worth quoting.

The resemblances between *Westward for Smelts* and *Cymbeline* have been most elaborately stated by Dowden (Introduction to *Cymbeline* in the *Arden Shakespeare*, London, 1903, p. xxix) "Here, as in Shakespeare's play, there is an English historical background; the disclosure of the villainy is preceded by the events of a battlefield. Here the heroine wanders in want of food, and she takes service under the leader of an army as a page; here the first suggestion of a wager comes from the villain; here he holds discourse with the lady, and represents himself as in her husband's confidence; and here she offers herself to be slain, and the faithful serving-man suggests that she shall assume a disguise."—All this is of no significance, however, unless we believe Steevens's assertion that he had seen an edition dated 1603. Dowden recognizes this: "But if *Westward for Smelts* was not published until 1620, some of the incidents of the

departure in analyzing the main plot of *Cymbeline*. But the fortunes of the theme in other hands must first be briefly examined.

The origins of the story of the man who makes a wager on the honor of his wife or mistress lie too far in the obscurity of the past for the sharpest eye to penetrate. Versions of especial interest, showing marked analogies

tale may have been conceived under the influence of the drama as seen upon the stage."

Furthermore, while the list of resemblances drawn up by Dowden looks very convincing, it shrinks woefully when examined closely, and when the very striking points in which the tale diverges from Shakspeare are observed, affecting the most dramatic part of the narrative;—for example, the villain is not carried into the chamber in a chest, he creeps under the bed; he does not observe the mole under the heroine's breast, but steals a gold crucifix. It hardly seems likely that the historical setting in the reign of Henry VI gave Shakspeare the idea of connecting the action with the mythical *Cymbeline* and the wars with the Romans. Most of the other resemblances can be paralleled from other early versions of the tale, or are such as arise naturally from the situation. The assumption of male attire and service as a page is found not only in Boccaccio but the *Miracle, Florus and Jehane* and the West Highland tale of *The Chest* (as a gillie); the idea of service in war follows naturally in days when gentlemen spent most of their time in fighting (cf. the *Florus*). The ladies in the *Comte de Poitiers* and the *Violette* are abandoned in the forest, and in both of these, as in many other versions, "the first suggestion of a wager comes from the villain, and he holds discourse with the lady." That a heroine abandoned in a forest should seek food, or meditate death, or that the faithful servant should suggest the donning of male attire are not, in my judgment, incidents of significance, once granted the basic situation. Such episodes as these are as common in romantic fiction as daisies in the fields.

It seems most likely that Kind Kit and Shakspeare used independent versions, each related to the *novella* of Boccaccio. I doubt if Kind Kit, had he drawn from Shakspeare's play, would have omitted such striking motives as the chest and the birthmark; and I cannot see any reason for supposing Shakspeare indebted to him at all, even granting that an edition of *Westward for Smelts* was published in 1603.

to *Cymbeline*, appear in Old French. In commenting on these, Gaston Paris remarked that "un chant populaire grec conserve la forme la plus ancienne de ce thème, et indique d'où il provient."¹⁵ *Li Comte de Poitiers*, a metrical romance of the thirteenth century, was probably the work of a travelling singer, who may well have drawn his material from popular sources.¹⁶ The *Roman de la Violette*, a very charming and elaborate poem, is, on the other hand, thoroughly aristocratic, designed for a high-born audience, and full of the refinements of courtly procedure.¹⁷ *Dou Roi Flore et de la Bielle Jehane*, a sprightly prose romance of the thirteenth century, which has been rendered into English by William Morris, shows strong ecclesiastical influence: the hero is more moved by piety than by love.¹⁸ *Un Miracle de Nostre Dame* (late fourteenth century) is a somewhat crude popular combination of religious and secular motives, showing faint resemblances to *Cymbeline* not observable in Boccaccio.¹⁹ In

¹⁵ *Littérature française au moyen âge*, Paris, 1905, p. 89.

¹⁶ Ed. F. Michel, Paris, 1831.

¹⁷ Ed. F. Michel, Paris, 1834. There has been some discussion as to the priority of this and the *Poitiers*. There can be little doubt, I think, that the *Violette* is later; its motivation, descriptions, social conventions and general literary workmanship indicate a more sophisticated era.

¹⁸ Moland et d'Héricault: *Nouvelles françaises en prose du xiiième siècle*. Bibl. Elzev. 1856, pp. 83 ff. Also Monmerqué et Michel: *Théâtre français au moyen âge*, Paris, 1842, pp. 417 ff. also contains the *Miracle*. For William Morris's version, see his *Old French Romances done into English*, London, 1896.

¹⁹ Too much should not be made of these; they seem the sort of thing which might occur in tales developing independently from the same situation. They were first noted by Collier in 1839, and still encumber discussions of sources. Collier's comment is reprinted in full by Dowden, *Arden Cymbeline*, pp. xxxii-iii. If there is any force in these parallels, they show that Shakspeare utilized a source now lost, related in some way to the *Miracle*.

all these versions, the personages belong to the nobility, though the method of narrative often suggests a homespun audience.

Other versions reflect bourgeois society. The most noteworthy of these is that by Boccaccio, with which should be compared the probably contemporaneous tale of an unknown Italian, generally referred to as "Anonymus."²⁰ In *Le Grand Parangon des nouvelles Nouvelles* by Nicholas de Troyes,²¹ written about 1536, is a treatment of the theme apparently based upon Boccaccio; it would be interesting to get a French version of this date uninfluenced by the Italian. The setting among a group of merchants is represented in England by the fragment of a prose tale, *Frederick of Jennen*, in the Douce Collection in the Bodleian,²² which breaks off directly after the wager-scene. How it would have been continued cannot be predicted with certainty, for a group of versions with a different dénouement must be taken into consideration.

In these the heroine deceives the villain into believing that she has sacrificed her honor, by persuading another woman to take her place,—a situation reminiscent of the central plot of *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well*. Here

²⁰ Cf. R. Ohle, *Shakespeare's Cymbeline und seine Romanischen Vorläufer*, Berlin, 1890; and M. Landau, *Quellen des Dekameron*, Stuttgart, 1884, p. 141.

²¹ Ed. E. Mabilie, Paris, 1869. Mabilie prints the following summary from a catalogue in the Ms., but does not reprint the tale itself. "La LII nouvelle, par maistre Ambrose. D'un marchand qui gagea à un autre qu'il feroit son plaisir de sa femme, et comment il fut en sa maison et ne lui fit rien, mais il rapporta par trayson au marchand, comme il avoit fait son plaisir de sa femme dont il gaigna la gageure; mais à la fin la trayson fut descelée dont le marchand fut griefment pugny."

²² F. J. Furnivall, *Robert Laneham's Letter*, N. Y. and London, 1907. The colophon to the tale states that it was printed in Antwerp in 1518. (See p. xxv.)

belong an episode in the tale of *Taliesin* in the *Mabino-gion*, in its present form as late as the fifteenth century,²³ and a noteworthy German rhymed tale, of a popular character, by Ruprecht of Würzburg.²⁴ Both of these are obviously derived from French sources. In the German story, the bet is made with an inn-keeper, after the merchants have given unfavorable accounts of their wives. An episode in the romance of *Perceforest* shows how the lady turns the tables on her accusers; a similar episode is found in *Bandello*.²⁵

The wager-theme was popular in Germany and Scandinavia in the sixteenth century; it was put into dramatic form by Jakob Ayrer about 1600, and it appears in Danish and Icelandic ballads.²⁶ The traditional versions are of great interest, comprising tales and ballads in Scottish, German, Roumanian, Venetian, Sicilian, gipsy, etc., and reflecting the theme in different ways.²⁷

As already stated, it is no part of the purpose of the present discussion to attempt an analysis of the wager-story in European literature. The foregoing brief review makes it plain how complicated such an analysis would be. Different episodes are combined with one another and

²³ See the edition by Nutt, London, 1902, pp. 301 ff.: "A very considerable number of 'Taliesin' poems had accumulated by the fifteenth century, from amongst which towards the close, as is most likely, a selection was made by the compiler of our tale." (P. 356.)

²⁴ F. H. von der Hagen, *Gesammtabenteuer: Hundert altdeutsche Erzählungen*. Bd. III, No. LXVIII; pp. 356 ff., Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1850. Cf. also the Introduction, pp. xci ff. An outline of the tale is given on p. 353. See also Brüder Grimm: *Altdeutsche Wälder*, Cassel, 1815; I, p. 35 (*Von zwein kaufmann*).

²⁵ R. Köhler, *Jahrbuch für Romanische und Englische Litteratur*, 1867, vol. 8, pp. 51 ff.

²⁶ Gollancz, *Temple Shakespeare*, Introduction, p. x, note.

²⁷ See especially the Introduction to the ballad of *The Two Knights*, Child, *English and Scottish Ballads*, vol. v, pp. 21 ff. (No. 268).

with extraneous material in bewildering variety, and too much has been lost to make it possible to trace a genealogy with safety. The wager-theme was constantly adapted to new settings and altered social conditions, and its motivation was correspondingly varied. As with medieval story in general, the incidents are but a framework upon which to build a structure suited to the taste of the times and the fancy of the teller. Only through a study of the circumstances and conventions which shaped it, and which influenced the author, can a given version be correctly interpreted.

II

Our attempt to gain a better understanding of the situation in *Cymbeline* will be simplified if we first consider the wager-scene by itself, with its immediate consequences (Acts I and II), and then the later conduct of Posthumus (Acts III-IV). Analysis of the wager itself must begin with a review of the closest extant analogue, which we may treat with due reservations as the source,—the *novella* in the *Decameron*. The explanation of the incidents in the *novella* must, of course, be sought as much in medieval habits of thought as in Boccaccio's own convictions. Since we do not know his direct source, it is difficult to estimate the extent to which he reshaped the tale; the main outlines are in accord with tradition. It is evident that he was not in full sympathy with the story.²⁸

At an inn in Paris some "very considerable Italian merchants" speak slightly of their wives, agreeing that women amuse themselves with lovers, when left behind at home, just as men do with such girls as come their way. But one merchant, named Bernabo, maintains that he has a thoroughly virtuous and incorruptible spouse. There-

²⁸ See below, p. 408, note 32.

upon Ambrogiuolo of Pisa scoffs at his boast, and saying that he must "reason with him" on the matter, proceeds in the following vein.²⁹ "'Thou thyself sayst thy wife is a woman and that she is of flesh and blood, as are other women. If this be so, those same desires must be hers and the same powers that are in other women to resist these natural appetites; wherefore however honest she may be, it is possible she may do that which other women do. . . .' To which Bernabo made answer, saying, 'I am a merchant, and not a philosopher, and as a merchant I will answer.'" He thereupon maintains that there are "discreet" women, and that his wife is one of them. The dispute runs on, and finally Bernabo proposes the wager. "'Since thou wilt have it that all women are so compliant and that thine address is such, I am content, so I may certify thee of my wife's honesty, to have my head cut off, as thou canst anywise avail to bring her to do thy pleasure in aught of the kind; and if thou fail thereof, I will have thee lose no otherwhat than a thousand gold florins.'" Ambrogiuolo replies that he will have no advantage in shedding Bernabo's blood, if he wins the wager, but he proposes that Bernabo stake five thousand florins against his thousand, and that he will undertake within three months to bring Bernabo proofs of his wife's infidelity. So the matter is arranged.

As to the social station and general type of mind represented by Bernabo there can be no doubt. He is not an aristocrat, but a merchant, and he opposes to the philosophical discussion in which he finds himself involved the simple faith of a man of the middle class,³⁰ proud in the accomplishments of a wife who would make a good waiting-woman,—"'moreover,' said [Bernabo], 'there was no

²⁹ I use the translation in the Furness *Variorum*.

³⁰ "I am a merchant, and not a philosopher."

sewer, or in other words, no serving-man alive who served better or more deftly at a nobleman's table than did she.' ” And it is noteworthy that it is he himself who proposes the wager, not the villain, as in Shakspeare's play. It is not an arrangement agreed to after provocation, but one put forward by Bernabo himself as a happy solution of the dispute. Clearly, if we are to blame Posthumus, we must be far more severe with Bernabo.

When considered from the medieval point of view, however, the conduct of Bernabo becomes comprehensible immediately. The beginnings of the story, as we may judge from the ballads and popular tales, told of a boast as to the excellence of a wife made in much the same spirit in which a man might vaunt the superior qualities of his horse. In early days one bought wives much as one now buys animals. In a version taken down orally in Islay in 1859, which bears many marks of tradition reaching back hundreds of years, the dispute is between a young king, who has just married—and paid for—a beautiful wife, and a sea-captain. The king wishes to buy silks for her, the best in the ship.

“Indeed!” said the captain, “thou must have an exceedingly good wife when thou must have a gown of the best silk I have on board.” “I have that,” said the king, “a wife many of whose equals are not to be got.” “Wilt thou lay a wager,” said the captain, “that with all her goodness I will not get leave to enter thy chamber?” “I will lay a wager, anything thou desiredst (sic), that thou wilt not.” “What wager wilt thou lay?” said the captain. “I will put the heirship in pledge,” said the king. Said the captain, “I will put all the silk in ship in pledge to thee that I will.” The captain came on shore and the king went on board.²¹

²¹ J. F. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, Edinburgh, 1860, vol. II, No. 18, pp. 1 ff. The editor comments: “It is not now the custom to buy a wife, and thereby acquire the right to shoot her; and yet this right is insisted upon, and acknowledged, and the story hinges on it” (p. 14).

In Boccaccio's tale the confidence of the husband has become a virtue: Bernabo opposes his faith in his wife's constancy to sophisticated arguments about the inherent sinfulness of women. We know that he was right in his estimate of her virtue; the tale proves that. And he is willing to go to any lengths to proclaim his confidence in her; the more dangerous the test, the more perfect does this confidence appear. Nowadays we feel that to give a villain a chance to attempt to seduce one's wife, for the sake of proving to him and to others her unassailable chastity, would be the height of folly, and of cruelty to her. But the Middle Ages thought otherwise; they believed that a virtue exaggerated, as it seems to us, beyond all reason, was a virtue magnified. Boccaccio affords various illustrations of this in the *Decameron*. In the tale of Mithridanes and Nathan (x, 3) a man, to prove his perfect liberality—that virtue so highly esteemed in the medieval prince—is ready to give his very life to anyone who asks it, even though the motive for taking it be ignoble. The tale of the patience of Griselda (x, 10), so far transgressing what we feel to be common-sense, is too well known to require more than mention. In the story of *The Two Friends* (x, 8), Gisippus, betrothed to Sophronia, finding that his friend Titus is passionately in love with her, renounces all his rights as a husband, giving her to Titus immediately after the wedding, in such a fashion that the girl does not recognize the substitution. Such, according to the story, is the self-sacrifice of the perfect friend. The well-known tale of *Amis and Amile*, in which one friend kills his children in order to heal the leprosy afflicting the other, points the same moral not less fantastically.

It is characteristic of stories of this type that the innocent are made to suffer in such demonstrations of virtue;

the children of Amile are completely forgotten in their father's love for his friend; Gisippus has not thought of the feelings of Sophronia in the cruel deception which emphasizes his devotion to Titus. In the variants of the wager-story in which the heroine preserves her honor by a trick, no thought is given to the woman substituted in her place. What of *her* honor? In the version of *The Two Knights* printed by Child the girl is the heroine's own niece,—a situation repulsive in the extreme to modern feelings.

Such tales as these enable us, through their very extravagances, to understand Bernabo's act in proposing a test which seems absurd and cruel, in order to show his complete faith in his wife's chastity. He does not, indeed, stand the trial of perfect constancy to the end; he is later overwhelmed by the apparently convincing evidence of his wife's infidelity. But in the beginning he is willing to go to any lengths to show his confidence. The Middle Ages obviously accepted episodes like this in the uncompromising belief that one cannot have too much of a virtue. There are, however, clear indications that Boccaccio did not wholly sympathize with the old medieval tale which he was retelling. His handling of it is reminiscent of the way in which Chaucer, through the Clerk's *Envoy*, pokes fun at the women after the "virtue-story" of the patient Griselda.³²

³² Boccaccio's tale is ostensibly told to show that the deceiver is sooner or later punished for his deception. Another moral is pointed by the Sultan of Alexandria at the end of the story, who "praised very highly the actions, courage and virtue of Ginevra." But this conclusion did not appeal to the gay young Florentines of Boccaccio's party, who had small faith in women's virtue, and knew many anecdotes illustrating their frailty. So Dioneo, perhaps the most loose-tongued of them all, maintains, in telling the tale of the old husband and the young wife immediately following, "that Ber-

The application of all this to *Cymbeline* is obvious. If Posthumus, in his ardor to maintain the unassailable chastity of his wife, accepts a wager which seems to us abhorrent and unfeeling, we have only to remember that there was enough of the medieval point of view surviving in Shakspeare's own day to make the arrangement seem justifiable. There is ample evidence of this in other Shakesperean plays. Consider, for instance, the situation in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Valentine is so perfect a friend that despite all the treachery of Proteus he is willing to give him his lady Silvia, at the very moment when he finds Proteus about to offer her the grossest outrage and violence.³³

And, that my love may appear plain and free,
All that was mine in Silvia I give thee.

Silvia, it will be recalled, is not consulted, though she has suffered extreme distress for her lover's sake. The whole situation is very reminiscent of that in Boccaccio's *novella* just referred to, in its general moral bearings, in which Gisippus, to show himself a perfect friend, gives Titus his own bride. In the *Merchant of Venice* Antonio is ready to place his life in jeopardy that his friend Bassanio may go to Belmont properly furnished as a wooer.

The first thing necessary with the wager-episode, then, is to look at it through medieval eyes. What seems to

nabo in disputing with Ambrogiuolo had acted rashly and foolishly." [cavalcasse la capra in verso il chino]. And all the company agree laughingly "that Dioneo spoke the truth and that Bernabo had been a great fool."

³³ Act v, Scene iv, ll. 82-3. The *Two Gentlemen of Verona* has been generally misunderstood as a love-story, whereas it is fundamentally a virtue-story illustrating friendship. Ingenious attempts like Dr. Batteson's to get around this dénouement by subtleties of logic miss the point completely. Cf. Sampson, Introduction to *Tudor Shakespeare, Two Gentlemen*, pp. xiv, xv.

modern feeling repugnant becomes plausible, and the strange popularity of the theme becomes more comprehensible. But there is much more in the situation than we can gather from Boccaccio. Shakspeare, as we shall see, has so altered it as to make the wager appear still more reasonable, and the conduct of the husband not only excusable, but inevitable.

III

The chivalric discussion at the house of Philario which Shakspeare describes in *Cymbeline* is as different as possible from the contest between "philosophy" and the pride of a bourgeois merchant in an accomplished wife in the pages of Boccaccio. It is clear at once that Shakspeare's characters are gentlemen, gathered at the residence of an Italian of wealth and social position. Their conversation is the elaborate, rather affected language of the courtier; this is particularly noticeable in the speeches of Iachimo. The social status of Posthumus is unmistakable; he is sprung from the noble stock of the Leonati and married to the daughter of a king. He is introduced to the company as an equal,—as Philario puts it to his friends, "Let him be so entertained amongst you as suits, with gentlemen of your knowing, to a stranger of his quality." This is, to all intents and purposes, a scene from the life of Shakspeare's own time, with the social conventions of gentler folk,—just the sort of company in which a young Englishman making the grand tour at the end of the sixteenth century might have found himself. The absurdity of connecting it with early Britain hardly needs comment: as Dr. Herford says, "Shakespeare clearly designed *Cymbeline* to be as much and as little a picture of Augustan Britain as *Hamlet* is a picture of eleventh century Denmark."

Shortly after the entrance of Posthumus it is recalled that there had once been a quarrel in Orleans, which came near to "the arbitrament of swords," in which Posthumus maintained his lady to be "more fair, virtuous, wise, chaste, constant-qualified and less attemptable" than the rarest of the ladies of France. Iachimo remarks that he must not rate her above those of Italy, and Posthumus retorts that he would "abate her nothing." The dispute waxes, and Iachimo alleges that "an accomplished courtier" could win away the lady, offering to wager thereon half of his estate against a valuable ring worn by Posthumus. Repeating his offer, he sets his own stake at ten thousand ducats. Posthumus embraces Iachimo's conditions, with the proviso that "if she remain unseduced, you not making it appear otherwise, for your ill opinion and the assault you have made to her chastity, you shall answer me with your sword." Thus the wager is concluded. The scene should of course be read in full, and compared with the account of it given by the repentant Iachimo in Act V.

The important thing to note here is that Shakspeare, in making Philario and Iachimo gentlemen instead of merchants, or an inn-keeper and a merchant, has made the conduct of Posthumus far more natural. The confidence of a trusting husband, willing to go to any extreme to show his confidence in his wife's integrity, is here reinforced by the solemn duty of a knight not to hesitate when the virtues and excellence of his lady are called in question. According to the rules of chivalry, Posthumus could have acted, as the perfect lover and gentleman, in no other way. We shall not attempt to determine how far Shakspeare, in placing the scene in an aristocratic rather than a bourgeois society, was influenced by a desire to make his story more convincing. Professor Thorndike has reminded us that in the dramatic romances of Beaumont and

Fletcher, to which this play probably owes much, "all principal characters are people of the court; even those who are utterly detestable hold positions of rank." Whether accident or design, this alteration is of the highest significance.

Various details in the conversation reveal the chivalric conventions which control it. Posthumus says of Imogen, "Being so far provoked as I was in France, I would abate her nothing, though I profess myself her adorer, not her friend," that is to say, "If I were to be so much roused to speak my mind as I was in France, I would rate her virtue no lower than I did then, even though I were judging as one worshipping her from afar, instead of as her accepted lover."³⁴ The purity of Imogen is so compelling

³⁴ This sentence has been generally misunderstood. The various attempts at elucidating it may be studied in the *Variorum*. "Friend" of course often means "lover," "sweetheart"; not always in a bad sense, though it frequently seems to indicate the intimacies of wedlock without the accompanying formalities of marriage. In *Measure for Measure*, Lucio says of Claudio, (I, iv, 29) "he hath got his friend with child." It is not Lucio's habit to speak foully of the good women in the play, and Juliet is surely one of these. Claudio thus explains his relations with her (Act I, Scene ii, ll. 155 ff.):

—upon a true contract
I got possession of Julietta's bed.
You know the lady, she is fast my wife,
Save that we do the denunciation lack
Of outward order.

Dr. Furness, who does not appear to have thought of this passage in *Measure for Measure* in this connection, suggests (Preface to the *Variorum Cymbeline*) that Imogen's marriage to Posthumus was a "handfasting." He points out that if Imogen were irrevocably married, the Queen would scarcely try to force Cloten upon her, or Cloten woo her, and that when he does so, Imogen never appeals to "the insuperable barrier of her marriage." The solution Dr. Furness finds in the Queen's words (I, v, 76). "She says in effect that Pisanio, as long as he lives, will be a witness or a 'remembrancer,' possibly the only witness, to the handfasting between Posthumus and

that even a man in the conventional chivalric attitude of loving hopelessly, as Troilus did Cressida in the beginning, or Palamon and Arcite Emelye, would be as sure of her virtue as the man to whom she had granted her "pity." The reader should also observe the threat of a duel to follow, in case Iachimo cannot prove his assertions against the lady, and the words of Iachimo, referring to Posthumus at the end of the play:

he, true knight,
No lesser of her honor confident
Than I did truly find her, steals this ring.
(Act V, Scene v, 187 ff.)

The suggestion of the wager comes, it will be noted, not from the husband, as in Boccaccio's tale, but from the villain Iachimo. The "true knight" might be loth to be drawn into a quarrel, but when the virtues of his lady were called in question, the code of chivalry gave him no choice in the matter. This may be illustrated by the following passage from the *Morte Darthur*. Launcelot has just come upon Sir Meliagaunce and Sir Lamorak, who are fighting to maintain the superior beauty of their respective ladies.

Imogen. The marriage was not then complete. It was merely a 'trothplight,' and, not having been blest by Holy Church, was not irrevocable,—certainly not if royal influence be brought to bear. . . . That the Handfasting was to her [Imogen] a ceremony as holy as marriage itself is evident by her calling Cloten a 'profane fellow' when he had asserted that her pretended contract with Posthumus was no contract, at least among royalties, as he says, although among the common people a self-figured knot, such as a 'handfast' is, might be deemed an impediment." Cf. the use of the word "fast" in the foregoing quotation from *Measure for Measure*, and the definition cited by the *New English Dictionary* from Jamieson, 1808-1825: "*To handfast*, to betrothe by joining hands, in order to cohabitation [sic], before the celebration of marriage."

Sir, said Meliagaunce, I shall tell you for what cause we do this battle. I praised my lady Queen Guenever, and said she was the fairest lady in the world, and Sir Lamorak said nay thereto, for he said Queen Morgause of Orkney was fairer than she, and more of beauty. Ah! Sir Lamorak [says Launcelot] why sayest thou so? It is not thy part to dispraise thy princess that thou art under her obeisance and we all. And therewith he alight on foot, and said, For this quarrel make thee ready, for I will prove upon thee that queen Guenever is the fairest lady and most of bounty in the world. Sir, said Sir Lamorak, I am loth to have ado with you in this quarrel. For every man thinketh his own lady fairest; and though I praise the lady that I love most, ye should not be wroth. For though my lady Queen Guenever be fairest in your eye, wit ye well Queen Morgause of Orkney is fairest in mine eye, and so every knight thinketh his own lady fairest; and wit ye well, Sir, ye are the man in the world, except Sir Tristram, that I am most lothest to have ado withal. But and ye will needs fight with me, I shall endure you as long as I may.³⁵

It is of especial interest to study the wager-scene in the *Roman de la Violette*. Of all the analogues to *Cymbeline*, this is the closest as regards its chivalric setting. Its atmosphere of courtly refinement may be gathered from the songs which the hero Girars sings in praise of his lady.

Quant bele dame et fine amors me prie,
 Encor ferai chançon cointe et jolie,
 Ne ja ne quier qu'envieus mot en die,
 Car onques n'es amai,
 Ne ja les ameraï;
 Et qui les aim, bien sai
 Qu'il fait cruel folie;
 Qu'envieus sont molt plain de félonnie.
 Tout ensi son chanter define;
 Mais Amours, ki onques ne fine,
 Le semont qu'il chante encore
 Ceste cançonette à karole:
 J'ai amors fait à mon gré
 Miels en vaudra ma vie.

To the proud boast of Girars in the presence of the court

³⁵ Ed. Strachey, London, 1901; Bk. ix, Chapter xiv.

that he loves a lady of surpassing beauty and is loved in return, Lisiars, "a worse man than Ganelon," retorts that he will wager his lands against those of Girars that the lady is by no means so constant, and that he will prove it within eight days. Girars, in his perfect confidence, accepts the wager immediately. The king attempts to dissuade Lisiars, telling him that he has started on a foolish venture, and that a man who attempts to shame another often finds that his efforts recoil on his own head.³⁶ But Girars scornfully interrupts, and tells the king to let Lisiars have his way; he himself has no fear of the outcome. So the wager is concluded.³⁷

It is noteworthy that the king does not attempt to dissuade the hero from accepting the wager, since he could not in honor refuse to take it up. Instead, the king endeavors to influence the villain Lisiars not to press it. But Girars, the perfect knight and lover, cannot allow any

³⁶ Just the moral which Boccaccio draws from the whole story.

³⁷ Dist li rois: "Lisiars amis,
En fole œvre vous estes mis
Ki vous vantés d' autrui hounir.
Li maus doit sor vous avenir:
S'iert à bon droit s'il i revient.
Nous véons que souvent avient
Que cil ki velt hounir autrui
Que li maus revertist sour lui.
Certes, si vous m'en créissiés,
Jà ne vous entremesisiés,"
"Avoi! Sire, che dist Gérars;
Puisque mesires Lisiars
Velt gagier, por moi ne remaine.
Ains aroit conquis Alemaigne,
Mien escient, par son escu,
Que de cest plait m'eüst vaincu.
Mais or laissons le ramprosner.
Pleges couvient chascun donner."

(ed. Michel, p. 18.)

suspicion of faithlessness to rest upon his lady, and calls for the immediate binding of the contract. So Philario, the host in *Cymbeline*, while disapproving of the wager made at his house and endeavoring to break off the discussion, never suggests that Posthumus shall reject it.

I suppose that it is hardly necessary to point out that elucidation of *Cymbeline* by reference to medieval courtly romance is abundantly justified by the survival and revival of chivalric conventions in the days of Elizabeth and James, both in literature and in the life of the court. Chivalry, as a practical rule of life, was moribund in the fourteenth century, yet it was splendidly observed at the court of Edward III, it was ostentatiously practiced during the Wars of the Roses, as for example by Malory's theatrical patron Richard Earl of Warwick, Henry VIII gave it magnificent expression at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, and it experienced a veritable rebirth under Elizabeth. A Virgin Queen enthroned gave new stimulus to elaborate and courtly compliment. From the time of her coronation, when Sir Edward Dimock rode on horseback into the hall, offering to fight any man who should deny Elizabeth to be the lawful sovereign of the realm, down to the days when, aged and wrinkled, she still demanded of her supporters the attentions bestowed by knights upon their lady-loves, chivalric observances ruled the outward manners of the court. Nor was the situation otherwise under James I. His accession was celebrated by a splendid tournament, and the glories of his state were sustained by lavish expenditures on knightly ceremonials. Prince Henry was especially fond of chivalric exercises, and excelled at tilting. As a rule, all this bore small relation to the actual life of the time; just as tilting had no significance for actual warfare as then practiced. Something of the true spirit of chivalry remained, however;

the exaggerations of Raleigh, the magnificence of Essex, were balanced by the true gentleness and courtesy of Sir Philip Sidney.

To note the reflection of all this in literature would be to tell a twice-told tale. If chivalry had lost its force as a social institution, it gained new splendor through its imaginative treatment in letters. Chaucer, Malory, Hawes, Spenser, Sidney were only the leaders of a host of poets and romancers, preserving these traditions from generation to generation. Medieval chivalry is, indeed, nowhere seen to better advantage than in literature, whether in the thirteenth century or the sixteenth; there it had a happier fortune than in the test of actual life, where its ardors often seemed ridiculous and its golden trappings tinsel. Everyone who knows what chivalry means can see its influence in the plays of Shakspeare, yet it is extraordinary how little the plays have been studied against the background of the medieval conventions surviving in the Elizabethan Age. If Shakspeare had occasion to put on the stage the fighting or the love-making of the highly born, he drew the picture in terms of the society with which he was familiar. It did not matter whether the play exhibited the walls of windy Troy, or the castle of Elsinore, or the park of the king of Navarre, or the Britain of Cymbeline, the manners took the shape of those of Elizabeth's court. Sometimes Shakspeare treated chivalric conventions as decoration, sometimes realistically, sometimes with gentle satire. He was particularly fond of contrasting the artificial wooing of the courtier with the divine passion of the lover, even though this might itself borrow the terms of chivalry for its expression. Romeo in love with Rosaline, all sighs and groans for a lady whom he can forget in a breath, is designedly contrasted with the Romeo of passionate whole-hearted devotion to Juliet; the Duke in

Twelfth Night, wooing a lady at long distance, and getting tremendous aesthetic satisfaction out of it, is a foil to Viola, loving with a sincere and unaffected heart; *Troilus and Cressida* offers a bewilderingly complex mixture of human passion and romantic convention; *Love's Labor's Lost* is a delightful burlesque of the various exaggerations of romantic love. We cannot delay over the matter further here. A study of the significance of medieval chivalry for an understanding of Shakspeare's plays, greatly needed as it is, demands extended treatment. Here we can only glance at it in connection with *Cymbeline*.³⁸

As everyone knows, *Cymbeline* was written at a time of renewed interest in romance. After an era of realistic comedy and of tragedy, the English stage experienced, in the latter part of the first decade of the seventeenth century, a great revival of interest in dramatic romance. This fashion appears to have been set by Beaumont and Fletcher, and to have been imitated by the greater dramatist, alert as he ever was for what would please public taste.³⁹ Many critics who have a perfect realization of this either neglect to take it into account in practice, or

³⁸ A suggestive, but not exhaustive treatment of this subject will be found in Professor W. H. Schofield's *Chivalry in English Literature*, Cambridge, Mass., 1912, pp. 183 ff. He calls attention to the tournament in *Pericles*, and particularly the challenge of Hector in *Troilus and Cressida*.

Hector, in view of Trojans and of Greeks,
Shall make it good, or do his best to do it,
He hath a lady, wiser, fairer, truer,
Than ever Greek did compass in his arms.

(Act I, Scene iii, ll. 273 ff.)

Professor Schofield notes the wager in *Cymbeline*, with brief comment, but does not analyze the situation in detail. I hope later to publish a study of the influence of medieval conventions on Shakspeare.

³⁹ See Thorndike, below, p. 424, note 50.

mistake the real nature of this romance. Mr. Arthur Symonds thinks of it as a kind of children's game. "Cymbeline is a romance, made out of Holinshed, and Bocaccio, and perhaps nursery stories, and it is that happiest kind of romance, which strays harmlessly through tragic incidents, in which only the bad people come to grief. All the time things seem to be knotting themselves up inextricably, everyone is playing at cross-purposes with every one, as in a children's game, immensely serious to the children. . . . We are following the track of a romance, and in countries where no one is sick or sorry beyond measure."⁴⁰ Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, reminding us to seek the truth of imagination rather than the truth of fact, refers us indiscriminately to *Blue Beard*, *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, the *Faerie Queene*, and *Pilgrim's Progress*.⁴¹

It is of the highest importance to distinguish the two different kinds of "romance" in *Cymbeline*. There is, on the one hand, a strong fairy-tale element in the play; the Guiderius-Arviragus plot has often been compared with the *märchen* of *Little Snow-White and the Dwarfs*. But this idyllic rustic material is in sharp contrast to the main plot. There the romantic conventions are of a very definite sort, as far removed from *Blue Beard* at one end as from *Pilgrim's Progress* at the other. They are the conventions of court life, which may also be studied, mingled with other material, in such plays as *Philaster*, the *Maid's Tragedy*, *Thierry and Theodoret*, conventions which were a survival of the Middle Ages, which had been an outgrowth and an accompaniment of the feudal sys-

⁴⁰ *Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by Sir Sidney Lee, N. Y. and Boston, 1911, Introduction to *Cymbeline*, p. xi.

⁴¹ See above, p. 392, note 3.

tem, and which were, in somewhat altered form, in the height of fashion in Shakspeare's time. They had been modified by Renaissance views of conduct, derived from Italian and classical sources, and by changes in the popular attitude towards moral questions. The Elizabethans were not ready to accept the adulterous love condoned by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁴² But they clung passionately to externals, and their romantic observances were full of the absurdities so characteristic of the Middle Ages.

So the wager in *Cymbeline*, in its fantastic exaggeration of confidence in Imogen's virtue, is at once thoroughly medieval and thoroughly Elizabethan. This old theme, hallowed by centuries of story-telling, happened to fit to a nicety, through its very extravagances, the spirit of sixteenth-century chivalry. At just about the time the play was written, Cervantes was satirizing excesses of this sort, in making Don Quixote place himself on the high-road, and stop the merchants of Toledo, unless they would acknowledge that there was not in the whole world a more beautiful damsel than Dulcinea del Toboso. Consider the ridiculous antics of Elizabeth's courtiers to express the havoc made by her charms upon their hearts. A favorite trick of Essex was to imitate the love-lorn medieval knight, and take to his bed, refusing all comfort, when the favor of his lady was withdrawn from him. Amusing, too, is Raleigh's attempt to drown himself, so great were "the horrors of Tantalus" which he endured when deprived of the sunshine of the royal presence. The disease spread even beyond the limits of the court. A little London tailor,

⁴² For a discussion of the chivalric elements in Shakspeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, see an article by the present writer in *Shaksperian Studies*, N. Y., (Columbia University Press) 1916.

fancying himself in love with Elizabeth, "whined himself to death" for her sake, and was doubtfully immortalized in verse by Lord Charles Cavendish.⁴³ Shakspeare has his fling at these absurdities again and again; we may even see a reflection of them in *Hamlet*, when Laertes is challenged to the most extravagant of feats to show his devotion to Ophelia,—to drink vinegar or eat a crocodile. As Taine puts it, "like the tars who tattoo a heart on their arms to prove their love for the girls they left behind them, you find men who 'devoured sulphur and drank urine' to win their mistress by a proof of affection."⁴⁴

Professor J. L. Lowes, in a remarkably suggestive essay, has pointed out that the treatment of melancholy and madness in Chaucer and Shakspeare can best be understood by a study of medieval medical doctrines.⁴⁵ So it is with Shakspeare's love-making and social usages; it is fruitless to analyze these from the modern point of view, they must be recognized for what they are: belated and altered conventions of medievalism. Mr. Henry Osborn Taylor sums up the matter admirably: "The Middle Ages helped antiquity to shape the faculties and furnish the tastes of the sixteenth century. These faculties and tastes were then applied to what the past seemed also to offer as from a distinct and separate platform. Only by realizing the action of these formative and contributive agencies, shall we perceive this period's true relationships, and appreciate its caused and causal being, begotten of the

⁴³ See, for episodes of this sort, Strickland, *Queens of England*, London, 1854, vol. iv, pp. 663-4; 587; 721.

⁴⁴ *History of English Literature*, N. Y., 1871, vol. i, p. 227. I can not verify the jumbled reference to Middleton with which he supports this.

⁴⁵ "The Loveres Maladye of Hereos," *Modern Philology*, vol. xi, pp. 491-546; esp. 544 ff. Cf. E. E. Stoll, *ibid.*, vol. iii, pp. 281-303.

past, yet vital (as each period is) with its own spirit, and big with a modernity which was not yet." ⁴⁶

Regarded from the point of view of medieval chivalric observance, then, the making of the wager assumes a new significance. Posthumus Leonatus emerges fully vindicated; his is the only conduct possible for the perfect lover and the perfect knight. But what of his later procedure? This is quite another matter, demanding separate consideration.

IV

After the very brilliant and carefully elaborated scenes in Acts I and II, which are beyond doubt Shakspeare's own work,—the parting of Posthumus and Imogen, the making of the wager, the interview between Imogen and Iachimo, the brief but beautifully managed episode in the bedchamber, the triumph of Iachimo over Posthumus, and the agonized soliloquy of Posthumus, in which he suspects the virtue of all women—we do not see Posthumus again until Act V. Letters from him are read, one bidding with feigned affection that Imogen meet him at Milford-Haven, and another commanding Pisanio to poison her. At the opening of Act V, it appears from his soliloquy over the bloody handkerchief that the rage of Posthumus and his desire for vengeance are quite over; he repents his command and the faithfulness of Pisanio in having, as he supposes, executed it, ending with lines of a banality that certainly make us suspect an interpolator or collaborator. The scenes on the field of battle and in the prison contain occasional evidences of his repentance, but add nothing new for his relations with Imogen, while they have often been suspected of being from another hand than Shak-

⁴⁶ *Thought and Expression in the Sixteenth Century*, N. Y., 1920 (Preface). Through Mr. Taylor's kindness, I am able to quote this from the proof-sheets.

spere's, especially the scene in the prison. The business in Cymbeline's tent in Act V is curiously managed: after the confession of Iachimo, Posthumus, with a fresh outbreak of repentance, strikes the disguised Imogen, who swoons, and upon reviving "begins an unseemly squabble with Pisanio. . . . Then poor old doddering Cornelius must needs be brought forward, and must tell again in prosy words what he has told us all once before, even to the very same reference to 'cats and dogs'! All this while poor Posthumus has nothing to do but to shift first on one foot and then on the other."⁴⁷—But most remarkable of all, I think, is the final reunion of Imogen and Posthumus. After all that has gone before, we certainly expect that the terrible misunderstanding which brings death so near for the lovers, the main-spring of the whole play, will be ended with appropriate dignity. Instead, all that the scene has to offer is this:

Imogen. Why did you throw your wedded lady from you?
 Think that you are upon a rock,⁴⁸ and now
 Throw me again. [Embracing him.]

Posthumus. Hang there like fruit, my soul,
 Till the tree die!

—a mixture of wrestling, horticulture and banality which could hardly be surpassed.⁴⁹

In short, then, the development of the main plot in the last three acts is most unsatisfactory, giving the impression of hasty and careless workmanship, as if the dramatist had lost his interest. Perhaps a collaborator was allowed too large a share here, but we must be chary of assuming that scenes were not written by Shakspeare because they seem

⁴⁷ *Variorum Cymbeline*, Introduction, pp. xiv-xv.

⁴⁸ Probably *lock*, as in wrestling, see Dowden, *loc. cit.*, p. 212.

⁴⁹ Perhaps not everyone will agree; Charles Cowden-Clarke thought this reunion "perfectly divine."

to fall far below his usual level. There is no doubt that he did, at times, hurried and very inferior work. It seems clear, in any case, that what interested him most was the earlier part of the tale; for the punishment which Posthumus attempts to inflict upon Imogen and the final reconciliation he felt little enthusiasm. One remembers Chaucer's treatment of the *Troilus*; when once Criseyde has left Troy, the poet's interest seems to flag, and the story hurries to its end.

The reason for all this is not far to seek. The really picturesque and individual part of the main plot is the making of the wager and its immediate outcome; the rest is a mosaic of the commonplaces of romance. Shakspeare's creative imagination was obviously stimulated by the psychological problem involved in the wager. A devoted husband, forced by knightly conventions into a novel and dangerous situation; a scheming villain, nevertheless clear-sighted enough to admire the purity of the wife and the nobility of the husband, and a heroine of stainless virtue and surpassing charm, made to appear guilty through a cruel and unusual combination of circumstances,—all this gave an opportunity for new situations and contrasts of character. But the ending of the story was a collocation of commonplace situations and motives, given individuality only by the superposition of the Guiderius-Arviragus plot. Shakspeare's poetic fancy was happily allowed full play in the lovely woodland scenes; the attention of the spectator is diverted to this attractive material, and the play is saved.

We have said that the latter part of the main plot is a "mosaic of the commonplaces of romance." Professor Thorndike, in a brilliant essay,⁵⁰ has shown in detail

⁵⁰ *The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakspeare*, Worcester, Mass., 1901.

the close parallelism between *Cymbeline* and the romances of Beaumont and Fletcher, particularly *Philaster*, which he believes influenced it. There is no need to repeat his analysis here. Of Imogen he says, "She is good and chaste and spirited; she resists an attempt at seduction; she wears boy's clothes; she leaves the court in search of her lover; she remains true to him after he has deserted her, and sought to kill her; she dies and is brought back to life again; she passes through all sorts of impossible situations to final reconciliation and happiness. In all this there is little trace of an individual character; *all this can be duplicated in the stories of Bellario and Arethusa.*"⁵¹ Similarly, the conduct of Posthumus recalls that of Philaster; compare the jealous letter of Posthumus (III, iv, 20) with the jealousy of Philaster upbraiding Arethusa (III, ii); the soliloquy of Posthumus denouncing women with that of Philaster (III, ii); even the wounding of Arethusa by Philaster (IV, iii) reappears in the striking of Imogen by Posthumus (V, v, 228).⁵²

The critics have been very severe on Posthumus for his ready belief in the guilt of Imogen, which indeed seems to anticipate Iachimo's full revelations, for his resolve to murder her, the cruelty with which he pursues this resolve, and finally for his sudden repentance, which is held to denote a fatal weakness of character. Yet we do not have to go beyond Shakspeare's own plays to see that these are conventions of romantic drama. The psychology and ethics of Shakspearean heroes are as much at variance with reality as are the curious legal systems in force in the countries where romantic events take place, the absurdities of which have often been noted. Consider how belief

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139. Italics mine.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 153.

in the guilt of Hero is shared by all the good people in *Much Ado*, save Beatrice and (perhaps) Benedick, yet how slender the grounds for that belief really are; how the violent jealousy of Leontes breaks out against his devoted wife and old play-fellow, with practically no foundation at all; and how suddenly, almost ludicrously, repentance for past acts comes to Proteus, Claudio, Angelo, Oliver, Bertram, and the Usurping Duke in *As You Like It*.⁵³ That Imogen must be put to death for her supposed unchastity is the only course possible for the romantic hero. It was a very old and widespread idea among the Indo-European peoples that the unchaste woman must pay for her frailty with her life, and that this is at the disposal of the husband whom she has wronged or the kinsfolk whom she has disgraced;⁵⁴ and this idea survived as a convention of the romantic drama down to the beginning of the seventeenth century, when a more humanitarian note was struck in *A Woman Killed With Kindness*. Instances of it are too common to need lengthy citation. Death, under such circumstances, was not viewed as revenge, but as just punishment, inflicted by private rather than public authority. Melantius, the brother of Evadne, the mistress of the king in the *Maid's Tragedy*, sums up the matter thus:

Evadne: You will not murder me?

Melantius: No; 'tis a justice, and a noble one,
To put the light out of such base offenders.

(Act IV, Scene i.)

⁵³ See comments by M. J. Wolff, in review of Schücking: *Die Charakterprobleme bei Shakespeare*, Leipzig, 1919, in *Englische Studien*, vol. 54, p. 169. I regret not to have been able to secure a copy of Schücking's volume.

⁵⁴ Cf. S. Rietschl, *Reallexicon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, Strassburg, 1913, sub *Ehebruch*.

Moreover, cruelty in inflicting the punishment, and in dealing with the guilty woman in general, was held to be only what she deserved. Our forefathers believed that to treat the sinner with consideration was to compound with sin. The erring wife or sister, like other criminals, laid herself open not only to chastisement, but to severity and insult. Othello, once convinced of the guilt of Desdemona, not only never hesitates in what he considers his duty,—to kill her, but he strikes and insults her, on one occasion using such language that even the loose-tongued Emilia is revolted, and exclaims, “a beggar in his drink could not have laid such terms upon his callat.” The cruelty of Leontes, in word and deed, needs only to be mentioned. A part of this, in his case as in Othello’s, must of course be laid to the operation of jealousy upon a highly passionate nature, but it is in part also the reflection of the Elizabethan tradition that brutality in the treatment of sin is justified. Parallels to the resolve of Posthumus that Imogen must die, and the means taken to put this resolve into effect, may be studied at the reader’s leisure in the analogues to *Cymbeline*.⁵⁵

What, then, are we to say of the character of Posthumus

“Boccaccio arranges the matter thus: “. . . on the ensuing day Ambrogiuolo was paid in full, and Bernabo, departing Paris, betook himself to Genoa with fell intent against the lady. When he drew near the city, he would not enter therein, but lighted down a good score of miles away at a country house of his and despatched one of his servants, in whom he much trusted, to Genoa with two horses and letters under his hand, advising his wife that he had returned and bidding her come to him; and he privily charged the man, when as he should be with the lady in such place as should seem best to him, to put her to death without pity and return to him.” In the *Roman de la Violette*, the hero tries to kill the heroine in a wood, but is prevented by the appearance of an enormous serpent; the warning cry of his wife saves his life, and he cannot bring himself to kill her. In the *Count of Poitiers*, the serpent is replaced by a lion. In *Florus and Jehane*, with its religious coloring and rather

as a whole? If we are to sum it up in a word, I think we must agree that he is meant to be a blameless hero. He is fully justified in the wager-business, and his subsequent procedure is entirely in accord with the ethics of romance. Moreover, Shakspeare himself tells us, in no uncertain terms, that Posthumus is a good man. In the opening scene of the play, the "First Gentleman," that very well-informed person who tells the "Second Gentleman" all about the situation at court, reports Posthumus as

most prais'd, most lov'd;
A sample to the youngest, to the more mature
A glass that feated them, and to the graver
A child that guided dotards; to his mistress,
For whom he now is banish'd, her own price
Proclaims how she esteem'd him and his virtue;
By her election may be truly read
What kind of man he is.

Every audience knows that such a faithful expositor is not misleading them, but giving such information that they may understand the rest of the play intelligently. Very significant, too, is the way in which people in the play generally, even the villain Iachimo, speak well of Imogen's husband.

Yet, if all this is true, why do we feel so little sympathy with Posthumus? Why have critics almost unanimously treated him with scorn? Why does his suffering leave us cold, and his marriage with Imogen fail to suggesting the mating of the eagle?

namby-pamby hero, the killing is omitted. In the *Miracle*, the hero says he would put the heroine to a shameful death if he could,

et certes, se la puis tenir
a honte la feray mourir.

(Monmerqué et Michel, p. 460.)

In the work of the so-called "Anonymous" Italian novella-writer, the husband sends his wife to a country estate, and charges a servant to drown her. (Ohle, p. 35.)

In answering these questions, several points must be kept in mind. In the first place, a hero according to a formula, whose acts are "a mosaic of the commonplaces of romance," is not likely to be consistent or convincing.⁵⁶ Very great brilliancy of characterization may accomplish this; a hero may be given so many little touches of individuality and naturalness that we forget the absurdity and inconsistency of his acts. It is one of the greatest of Shakspeare's marks of genius that he could do this when he liked. Old stories full of the wildest improbabilities were thus, by his magic touch, completely transformed, and made to seem psychologically sound. Out of the old motives of the Choosing of the Caskets and the Pound of Flesh he created Portia and Shylock; out of the fairy-tale of the King and his Three Daughters Lear and Cordelia, out of the archaic marriage-taboo theme in *All's Well* the beautiful figure of Helena. But at times he was too careless or too indifferent to give even very important characters this final and transforming touch. He did it for Imogen,⁵⁷ but not for Posthumus. The noble scion of the

⁵⁶Thorndike shows that Beaumont and Fletcher, in their dramatic romances, "sacrificed atmosphere, characterization, and verisimilitude in their eagerness to secure theatrical effectiveness. . . . When the situations are made of chief importance, there can be no shading in characterization. All the people must be indubitably bad or indubitably good. . . . [Philaster] is at different moments an irresolute prince, a fervent lover, a jealous madman, and a coward who cannot fight; he is never a real individual."

Of the Shakspearean dramatic romances, produced, as Thorndike believes, under the influence of Beaumont and Fletcher, he says, "In characterization, no less than in plots, the romances show a marked difference from Shakspeare's other plays. The characters show, above all, a surprising loss of individuality. They are less consistent, less subtly drawn, less plausibly human; they are more the creatures of stage situations. Their salient characteristics are exaggerated and emphasized by descriptions placed in the mouths of other persons." (Cf. pp. 114-137.)

⁵⁷Thorndike maintains that "in comparison with the women in

Leonati remains a lay-figure, with all the appropriate gestures, but never instinct with the breath of life.

In the second place, modern readers and playgoers do not find the acts and expressions of Posthumus heroic. They do not share the peculiar view of chivalric obligation which sways him in the wager-scene, and they do not believe that virtue which flies in the face of common-sense remains virtue. They have learned a more humane tradition for the punishment of the woman taken in adultery. And they demand in a hero more consistency, more use of his wits, more emotional restraint. The ravings of Posthumus, his rapid fluctuations of purpose, disgust Anglo-Saxons of today, bred to repress their deepest feelings. Moreover, Posthumus has to bear all the heavier burden of reprobation because the misfortunes of Imogen are due to his errors. Every reader of the play loves this radiant and spirited girl; what more natural than to dislike the husband who makes her suffer? "Womanish tears" and "wild acts" ⁵⁸ may be pardoned in Romeo, who sacrifices everything for Juliet, but not in Posthumus, who makes Imogen herself the sacrifice. It will probably make little difference to remind people that Posthumus has justification for his course of action; they will continue to think just as meanly of him. Perhaps they are right. We are all familiar with the way in which "good" persons in real

the early sentimental comedies, Rosalind, Beatrice, Portia and Viola, she lacks the details of characterization, the mannerisms which remind us of real persons, and suggest the possibility of portraiture. In comparison with these heroines, an analysis of Imogen's character fails to supply really individual traits; one is thrown back on a general statement of her perfectibility." It seems to me that this hardly does Imogen justice. The question is, however, a difficult one to settle; the evidence is for the most part intangible, depending upon the subjective impressions of the critic.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, Scene iii, l. 109.

life, with virtue on their side, and a valid reason for every act, can make the innocent suffer. We wish that Posthumus had thought more of Imogen and less of social conventions. We wish, in short, that he were a man with modern notions, instead of an Elizabethan with medieval ideals still dogging him. But we must remember that the judgments which we pass on him today are probably harsher than those of the men who beheld his figure on the stage under the grey and shifting skies of London three hundred years ago.

We began this discussion with Dr. Johnson's famous criticism of *Cymbeline*; what shall we say of it in closing? Our study has revealed at once its truth and its falseness, or, let us say, the falseness of more specific criticisms to the same effect. We have seen that much in the play which seems absurd and improbable today becomes, in the light of Elizabethan ethics and social conventions, natural and reasonable. But nothing can save the play as a whole from the reproach of "much incongruity." This is, however, confined almost wholly to the last three acts; to the end of the second act *Cymbeline* is a play to be taken seriously, as plausible as *Othello*. Then it goes to pieces, as far as naturalness is concerned, and becomes a kind of—dare we say it?—variety-show, in its multitude of dramatic situations, many of them wildly improbable, mingled with a procession of ghosts, the stage trick of Jupiter, the eagle, the thunderbolt, political prophecy, and so forth. "The impossibility of the events in any system of life" must be granted immediately. But how far we can afford to chide Shakspeare when he pours out the whole cornucopia of stage-tricks before us, in this reckless and prodigal fashion, and accuse him of "unresisting imbecility," is a question which shall be left to others to decide.

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